NAVY SURGEON GENERAL TESTIFIES BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

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Editor's note: Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, Navy surgeon general and chief, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, provided the following opening remarks to the House Armed Services Committee, subcommittee on Military Personnel during a hearing Dec 5 on Military Health System reform and readiness. Remarks as prepared by Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham

Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Kelly, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the mission-ready Navy Medicine team, I am pleased to be here today with my colleagues to provide you an update on an important issue for all of us − Military Health System reform.

As we move forward with systemic changes in the MHS, I want to assure you that the foundation of Navy Medicine is readiness. Our highest priority is keeping Sailors and Marines healthy and ready to deploy − and ensuring they get the best care possible from trained and confident providers when they are wounded or injured. The Nation depends upon Navy Medicine's unique expeditionary medical expertise to prepare and support our Naval forces. **To this end, our priorities of People, Platforms, Performance and Power are aligned to meet this commitment: Well-trained People, working as cohesive teams on optimized Platforms, demonstrating high velocity Performance that will project medical Power in support of maritime superiority.**

On any given day, Navy Medicine personnel are deployed and operating forward in the full range of diverse missions including: austere damage control resuscitation and surgery teams in Central Command and Africa Command; trauma care at the NATO Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit in Kandahar, Afghanistan; humanitarian assistance onboard hospital ship USNS COMFORT; and, expeditionary health services support with Joint, Fleet and Fleet Marine Forces around the world.

A week ago, I had the honor of celebrating Thanksgiving with our Navy Medicine personnel forwarded deployed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti as part of the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa. I saw firsthand the important work they continue do to ensure the health and readiness of our service members and multinational partners. All of us can be justifiably proud of the great work they did.

Collectively, the substantive reform legislation contained in the Fiscal Years 2017 and 2019 National Defense Authorization Acts represents an important inflection point for military medicine and catalyzed our efforts to strengthen our integrated system of readiness and health.

Navy and Marine Corps leadership recognize the tremendous opportunity we have to refocus our efforts on medical readiness while transitioning health care benefit administration to the Defense Health Agency. I want to emphasis that while, significant organizational change in health care is inherently complex, all of us testifying before you today know we have shared responsibilities to ensure that both the Services and the DHA are successful. Our efforts will continue to reflect this imperative moving forward.

Integral to the MHS-wide transformation is the transition of our military treatment facilities to the DHA. In October, the DHA assumed authority, direction and control of all MTFs in the continental United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. As a component of this significant transition, we are continuing to provide defined support to the DHA as it progresses to full operating capability.

In addition, Navy Medicine is making important changes at all levels to support our refocus on readiness. We are streamlining activities that directly impact our capabilities to support operational requirements and ensure we have a trained and ready medical force. We must have the agility to rapidly deploy – anytime, anywhere – to support Fleet and Fleet Marine Forces missions and platforms, including expeditionary medical facilities and units, hospital ships, as well as casualty receiving and treatment ships.

The success of Navy Medicine is inextricably linked to a dedicated and well-trained workforce. We continue to emphasize recruiting and retaining personnel with the proper skill sets to care for Sailors and Marines, particularly those with critical wartime specialties. Thank you for your support, both in resources and authorities, to help us maintain our most important asset – the Navy Medicine team.

In summary, we continue to make progress in our transformation efforts; however, all of us recognize there is much hard work ahead as we continue to build an efficient and sustainable integrated system of readiness and health.

Once again, thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Rear Adm. Gillingham's written testimony is available here